

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 061762

FOLLOWING REPEAT LAGOS 2899 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO KADUNA
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QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L 2 LAGOS 2899

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: INAUGURATION OF NIGERIA LABOR CONGRESS

REF: (A) 77 LAGOS A-112 DEC 21, (B) 77 LAGOS 13313,
(C) 77 LAGOS A-100 NOV 5, (D) 77 LAGOS A-72 JUL 30

1. SUMMARY: THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE NIGERIA LABOR CONGRES
(NLC) WAS HELD IN IBADAN FEBRUARY 28 - MARCH 1, 1978. TO THE SUR-
PRISE OF SOME LABOR LEADERS, LABOR COMMENTATORS AND THE GOVERN-
MENT, H.A. SUNMONO, A LEADING LEFTIST TRADE UNION LEADER, WAS
ELECTED PRESIDENT. WESTERN ORIENTED UNIONISTS BELIEVE THEY WILL
STILL BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN SOME CONTROL OVER THE NLC THROUGH THEIR
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ANTICIPATED MAJORITY ON THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (NEC) OF THE
NEW UNION. FURTHER DISCONFORTING TO THE GOVERNMENT WERE DIS-
CUSSIONS AMONG THE VICTORIONS LEFTISTS IN IBADAN OF UTING
THE NEW NLC WITH A SOCIALIST-ORIENTED POLITICAL PARTY AFTER THE
FMG LIFTS ITS BAN ON POLITICAL PARTIES.
END SUMMARY.

2. THE NEW NATIONAL LABOR FEDERATION, NIGERIA LABOR CONGRESS (NLC), WAS INAUGURATED AT THE OLD WESTERN HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY IN IBADAN ON FEBRUARY 28 AND MARCH 1. FOLLOWING OPENING SPEECHES BY CHIEF OF STAFF SUPREME HEADQUARTERS, BRIGADIER SHEHU YAR'ADUA, COMMISSIONER OF LABOR, NAJOR GENERAL HENRY E.O. ADEFOPE, AND ADMINISTRATOR OF TRADE UNION AFFAIRS, MICHAEL ABIODUN, THE FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS AND BIGGEST SURPRISE WAS THE ELECTION OF THE NEW PRESIDENT. LEFTIST TRADE UNION LEADERS HAD MET OVER A WEEK EARLIER AND PICKED A SLATE OF CANDIDATES TO PUSH IN THE ELECTION. THROUGH BETTER ORGANIZATION, AND PERHAPS, HIGHER BRIBES, HASSAN ADEBAYO SUNMONU, A PROTEGE OF BANNED LEFTIST LEADER WAHAB GOODLUCK, WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT WITH A PLURALITY OF 163 OF 412 VOTES CAST. THE REST OF THE LEFTIST SELECTED SLATE WAS ALSO ELECTED.

3. UMOH JAMES UNOH, LABOR EDITOR OF THE DAILY TIMES AND LEADING COMMENTATOR, EXPRESSED SOME SURPRISE AT THE RESULTS OF THE ELECTION. HOWEVER, IN HIS COLUMN A WEEK EARLIER HE HAD ALREADY WARNED ABOUT THE 'REPREHENSIBLE AND DICTATORIAL' PRACTICE OF SOME IN SELECTING A SLATE OF CANDIDATES. HE ACCUSED THESE LEADERS OF DISREGARDING THE 'DEMOCRATIC AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS OF THE WORKERS.'

4. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WERE ALSO TAKEN BY SURPRISE AS A RESULT OF THE VOTE. APPROXIMATELY ONE WEEK EARLIER, ONE MINISTRY OF LABOR OFFICIAL WHO HAD BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN THE CREATION OF THE NEW TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION CONFIDENTLY STATED THAT HE BELIEVED CONFIDENTIAL

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THE WESTERN ORIENTED LEADERS WOULD OBTAIN CONTROL OF THE NEW NLC. ONE OBSERVER WHO BRIEFLY SAW THE COMMISSIONER OF LABOR AFTER THE VOTE NOTED THAT HE APPEARED RATHER GLUM. TWO WESTERN OBSERVERS ATTENDING CONFERENCE, INCLUDING EMBASSY'S LABOR OFFICER, WERE ASKED NOT TO ATTEND POSVNONFERENCE COCKTAIL PARTY, AND ONE WHO DID WAS QUICKLY USHERED AWAY FROM SITE&.

5. EEBOFF DISCUSSED ELECPIONS WITH WESTERN-ORIENTED TRADE UNION LEADERS FOLLOWING ELECTION. ALTHOUGH DISMAYED AT THE RESULT OF THE ELECTIONS, THEY EXPRESSED FAITH IN THEIR ABILITY TO RETAIN CONTROL OF NEW ORGANIZATION THROUGH DOMINATION OF NEW NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (NEC). (AS REPT
TED REF A EMJI SY POLITICAL/
LABOR ASSISTANT ESTIMATES THAT LEADERS FROM THE OLD ICFTU-AFFILIATED UNITED LABOR CONGRESS WILL CONTROL ABOUT 24 OF 43 MEMBER UNIONS).

6. WITHIN MINUTES OF SUNMONU'S ELECTION, LASTEST EDITION OF NEW HORIZON, WHICH REPORTEDLY RECEIVES SOVIET EMBASSY SUPPORT AND DESCRIBES ITSELF AS 'NIGERIA'S SOCIALIST MONTHLY' (SEE REF C), WAS AVAILABLE FOR SALE TO DELEGATES. SUNMONU'S PICTURE WAS ON COVER WITH FOLLOWING TITLES: 'TRADE UNIONS: NLC'S NEW PROFILE' AND 'SOCIALIST PARTY 1979: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS'. ONE ARTICLE

INCLUDED PROFILE OF SUNMONU ENTITLED 'PRESIDENT OF PRESIDENTS' AND DESCRIBING HIM AS 'NUMBER ONE CHOICE' FOR THE NLC PRESIDENCY. ANOTHER ARTICLE ADVOCATED 'AFTER WORKERS' UNITY, WORKERS AND FARMERS MUST UNITE TO FORM A POLITICAL FRONT.' THERE WAS ALSO DISCUSSION AMONG SOME REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT THAT NLC MIGHT SUPPORT A SOCIALIST POLITICAL PARTY IN 1979 ELECTIONS. BOTH THE NEW UNION CONSTITUTION AND THE NEW DRAFT CIVILIAN CONSTITUTION WOULD PROHIBIT SUCH A DIRECT LINKAGE.

7. CONSTITUTION FOR NEW NLC WAS ALSO ADOPTED AT CONFERENCE. THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IS EMPOWERED TO 'ENTER INTO

RELATIONS WITH TRADE UNION AND LABOR MOVEMENTS IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES... WITH A VIEW TO SECURING UNITED ACTION AND MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIAL

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FRATERNAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER TRADE UNIONS OF THE WORLD...' THUS THE DOOR HAS BEEN REOPENED TO INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS FOR THE NIGERIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.

8. COMMENT: AS NOTED ABOVE, THE ELECTION OF A LEFTIST SLATE OF OFFICERS WAS A SURPRISE TO MANY INVOLVED IN THE REBIRTH OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA. ALTHOUGH TRADE UNION LEADERS MADE ACCUSATIONS OF SOVIET SUPPORT FOR SUNMONU AND HIS FOLLOWERS, THERE WAS NO HARD EVIDENCE OF SUCH SUPPORT OTHER THAN THE APPEARANCE OF NEW HORIZON IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE ELECTION. IT STRIKES US AS A CLASSIC EXAMPLE OF GOOD PREPARATORY ORGANIZATION WITH POSSIBLE SOVIET SUPPORT (SEE REF C).

9. ANALYZING THE ELECTION, WE NOTE THAT OF THE SIX CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT, THE THREE LEFTIST CANDIDATES, SUNMONU, HUDSON MUMODU AND J.A. ALAJO, GARNERED A TOTAL OF 249 VOTES, A CLEAR MAJORITY. ALTHOUGH SUNMONU'S GROUP IS GENERALLY VIEWED AS THE MORE HARD CORE, THE TOTAL VOTE CERTAINLY SUGGESTS A STRONG LEFTIST ELEMENT WITHIN THE NIGERIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. WE SHOULD ALSO NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT SUNMONU'S VICTORY MARGIN CAME IN PART

FROM DEFECTIONS OF NIGERIAN UNION OF RAILWAYMEN DELEGATES WHOSE PRESIDENT, J.O. ADEGBESAN, THE LEADING WESTERN ORIENTED CANDIDATE, WAS SECOND WITH 115 VOTES. THESE DEFECTIONS AND THOSE OF SOME DOCKWORKERS WERE THE SOURCE OF ACCUSATIONS OF BRIBERY; HOWEVER, ADEGBESAN HAD ONLY BEEN ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE RAILWAY UNION A WEEK BEFORE THE NLC MEETING. BOTH HIS UNION AND THE DOCKWORKERS HAVE BEEN TORN WITH INTERNAL STRIFE. THUS, SUNMONU'S SURPRISE SUPPORT MAY SIMPLY BE THE RESULT OF TRADITIONAL INTRA-UNION SQUABBLES.

10. THE FMG MUST NOW LIVE WITH A UNION MOVEMENT IT CREATED WHICH IS NOT ENTIRELY TO ITS LIKING. YAR'ADUA IN HIS SPEECH STATED THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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THE GOVERNMENT WOULD AUTOMATICALLY RECOGNIZE THE NLC WITH THIS CONFERENCE AND THAT ALL COMPANIES WOULD BE REQUIRED TO AUTOMATICALLY RECOGNIZE MEMBER UNIONS. IN DISCUSSING THIS SITUATION A WEEK BEFORE THE MEETING, ONE MINISTRY OF LABOR OFFICIAL TOLD EMBOFF THAT FMG MAY BE CREATING A 'SON OF FRANKENSTEIN', BUT IN ANY CASE WOULD LIVE WITH IT.

11. THE UNIONS NOW CONSTITUTE THE ONE NATIONALLY ORGANIZED POLITICAL FORCE IN THE COUNTRY WITH A MEMBERSHIP OF 880,000 TO ONE MILLION WORKERS HOW EFFECTIVELY THIS FORCE CAN BE TRANSLATED INTO POLITICAL POWER REMAINS TO BE SEEN. AS THE SOCIALISTS WILL PROBABLY CONSTITUTE THE ONE TRUE NATIONAL PARTY UNDER THE NEW GOVERNMENT, AS OPPOSED TO MULTIREGIONAL AND MULTIETHNIC MARRIAGES OF CONVENIENCE, THEY MAY BECOME A POWERFUL POLITICAL FORCES IF THEY ARE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY UNITE WITH THE NLC.

12. WE DOUBT THAT AN EFFECTIVE SOCIALIST PARTY NLC MARRIAGE CAN BE CONSUMMATED. AT THE SAME TIME WE QUESTION THE OPTIMISM OF TRADE UNION LEADERS THAT THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE NEW NLC PRESIDENT. THE NEC IS A LARGE BODY (APPROXIMATELY 138 MEMBERS ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION) WHICH WILL MEET ONCE EVERY THREE MONTHS. SUNMONU WILL BE IN CHARGE OF DAILY OPERATIONS FOR THE NLC.

13. ON A MORE UPBEAT NOTE FROM THE TRADE UNION PERSPECTIVE, WESTERN-ORIENTED UNION LEADERS TOLD EMBOFF THEY ANTICIPATED SOLVING THEIR DIFFICULTIES FROM WITHIN THE EXISTING UNION STRUCTURE RATHER THAN SEEKING TO FORM SPLINTER UNION GROUPS. OF COURSE, UNDER THE NEW RULES ANY SPLINTER ORGANIZATIONS WOULD BE ILLEGAL.

14. WE WILL REPORT MORE DETAILS OF NEW ORGANIZATION ELECTION AND CONSTITUTION BY AIRGRAM.
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